
Young Alumni Excellence Awards

Early Career Successes Lead to AOG Honor

Four USAFA graduates have been named as this year's honorees for the Association of Graduates' Young Alumni Excellence Award. The award recognizes graduates for exceptional professional accomplishment, whether in military or civilian life.

Nominees must be within 15 years of their graduation year to be considered.

A total of 15 young alums were nominated for the award this year, including 14 active duty personnel and one civilian. Graduate years represented among the honorees were from 2003 to 2015.

This year's winners will be recognized at various regional Founders Day banquets in the spring. This is the fourth year for this special AOG award and a total of 17 alumni have received the honor so far.

Maj. George E Cannon III '05



Currently an Air Force test pilot with the 461st Flight Test Squadron at Edwards Air Force Base in California, Cannon holds master's degrees in electrical and computer engineering, flight test engineering, national strategic studies, and business administration.

Cannon is a former USAFA Cadet Wing commander and a six-time distinguished

graduate (USAFA, ENJJPT, IFF, F-15E B-Course, SOS and Naval Command and Staff College) who flew 116 combat missions during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Cannon is both a graduate of and instructor for the USAF Test Pilot School. While on the staff, he became qualified to be an instructor test conductor and test director. This means he is the only person in the entire Air Force authorized to conduct test flight missions (and instruct how to conduct those missions) on both ends of the radio (in the cockpit and in charge of the control room). This capability and his work as the USAF TPS Chief F-16 pilot to revitalize the high-angle-of-attack test curriculum resulted in his 2019 nomination for the Air Force Association's Theodore von Karman Award for most outstanding contribution to the field of science and engineering. In addition, Cannon has flown every current fighter aircraft in the Department of Defense arsenal — A-10, F-15, F-16, F-18, F-22 and F-35. He has shown exceptional leadership throughout his career, including serving as the acting director of operations of the F-22 Developmental

Test Squadron, and AFMC F-22 chief pilot, managing \$1.2 billion in assets and hundreds of millions of dollars in classified test programs. He was ranked above 600 of his peers as the SOS Commandant's Leadership Award winner.

He currently leads and flies developmental test and evaluation missions for the F-35A/B/C (all three variants) and in the F-16 as a member of the Integrated Test Force. Additionally, Cannon is still an instructor pilot and instructor flight test engineer at the United States Test Pilot School.

Cannon volunteers in the local community, and during a deployment to Afghanistan he started a toy drive for local children and then personally helped distribute the toys that he collected. He also volunteered in the trauma unit of the Bagram field hospital.

Capt. Karl Grosselin '12



The 2018 Air Force Space Command Lance P. Sijan Leadership Award winner in the Junior Officer category, Grosselin will compete at the Air Force level this coming spring. He was also named Space and Missile Systems Center (Wing) Company Grade Officer of the Year for 2018. He holds a master's degree in operations management from the

University of Alabama.

Upon graduation from USAFA, Grosselin was assigned to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, where he served as pro-

gram manager within the F-16 Program Office. He led a critical \$300 million F-16 avionics upgrade, essential to filling the fighter gap caused by F-35 program delays. Next, Grosselin moved to the National Air and Space Intelligence Center, where he led a 50-person team providing timely counterspace intelligence products. He revamped the main support contract to allow needed intelligence support contracts to be awarded in days rather than the average of two to three months. Grosselin was hand-selected for the Space Superiority Systems Directorate at Los Angeles Air Force Base, California. He helped set the standard for a new rapid acquisitions approach across the Space and Missile Systems Center. In a period of weeks, Grosselin led a 12-member team that produced a \$1.2 billion Space Superiority Roadmap and Acquisition Strategy, safeguarding critical classified space capabilities.

During 2018, Grosselin was competitively selected for the USSOCOM Ghost Program. He deployed to the USSOCOM Program Executive Office for Fixed Wing at MacDill Air Force Base, where he directed a \$575 million unmanned aircraft joint urgent operational need. Grosselin was able to cut over six months of schedule from the program and deliver the much-needed capability to deployed airmen around the globe. Karl then forward-deployed to three different combat locations across Africa.

In addition, Grosselin is a community leader. While in Ohio, he served as the Alter High School assistant boys volleyball coach. He was also selected as the captain of the All-Air Force Men's Volleyball Team four times and the team's head coach. His leadership has guided the Air Force team to three Armed Forces Championships.

During his deployment, Grosselin planned 12 youth soccer matches at a local African orphanage, reducing local terrorist influence and winning hearts and minds. In addition, Grosselin serves as an Academy Liaison Officer, where he helped execute a cadet candidate admissions seminar for more than 100 applicants in Los Angeles.

Capt. Katherine Higdon '11

Higdon holds a master's degree in leadership and human resources from Webster University. She is currently assigned to Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts, as a career-broadening job in acquisitions. She was hand-selected by the (13M) Headquarters Air Force Career Field Management to fulfill this highly competitive position. After completing the Basic Acquisition Course at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, Higdon was assigned to develop and execute



ing Systems low-cost modification for today's and tomorrow's Air Force. Only eight months into this assignment, Higdon is on track to complete her Acquisition Level I certification more than six months ahead of her peers.

Upon graduation from USAFA, Higdon was assigned as the Airfield Operations Systems officer within the 23rd Operations Support Squadron at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia. During her time at Moody, Katherine obtained qualifications in the Radar Approach Air Traffic Control and Airfield Management specialties. As a 2nd lieutenant, Higdon was selected as the Air Operations Coordinator for the 2012 Moody Air Force Base Airshow.

Her next assignment was the airfield operations flight director of operations at Royal Air Force Mildenhall, United Kingdom. She led 37 airmen in the bed down of the first CV-22 aircraft at Mildenhall, \$33 million in construction projects and the movement of more than 5,000 passengers supporting five combatant commands. Her leadership was vital in her flight's winning the 2013 USAFE/AFAFRICA Airfield Operations Complex of the Year.

Higdon also has been stationed at Tinker Air Force Base and Lajes Field Air Base. In 2016, she deployed to Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates. During this period, she was the Airfield Operations flight commander supporting combat operations as a part of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Her dedication to the mission resulted in successful execution of 4,500 combat sorties, 2,402 combat airstrikes, 158 million pounds of fuel delivered, 11,538 ISR hours and 1,400 enemy combatants killed in action.

Higdon has been chosen as the Company Grade Officer of the Year on three separate occasions. She has won CGOY at the squadron (2014), group (2015) and wing (2016) levels within different wings and MAJCOMs. In addition, Higdon was selected as the Lajes Air Base Group Lance P. Sijan Award winner for 2017.

Higdon leads in the local community as well. She has taught Sunday school and children's church, raised money for battered women, and has worked in and around her local community at every base. She is in the process of founding a nonprofit organization that gives underprivileged youth scholarship opportunities.

In her spare time, Higdon is a bodybuilding competitor, a certified USA gymnastics coach and a certified personal trainer as well.

Lt. Col. Nathan Preuss '03



participate in various capacities. Preuss also serves as "encroachment

Currently the 80th Operations Support Squadron director of operations at Sheppard Air Force Base, Preuss oversees flying operations at the busiest joint-use airfield in the Air Force and in the largest squadron in the 80th Flying Training Wing in support of the only international fighter-training program — the Euro NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program — where 14 nations

czar” for Sheppard AFB. He built partnerships with local, state and federal agencies and the Department of Defense to mitigate wind farm developments near Sheppard’s airfield and low-level routes. As encroachment czar, he was hand-selected to speak at the annual Desk and Derrick Club meeting for 100 members, where he raised awareness of wind farm impacts on flying operations. Senior leaders routinely and personally ask him for his analysis on current and future wind farm projects that may impact flying operations.

In addition, Preuss serves as an Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals (IFF) instructor pilot in the 88th Fighter Training Squadron. Prior to his Sheppard AFB assignment, he served as an IFF instructor pilot at Columbus Air Force Base for three years, making him one of the most experienced active duty IFF IPs in the Air Force.

Upon USAFA graduation, Preuss attended Undergraduate Navigator Training and flew C-130s, upgrading rapidly to instructor and evaluator navigator. In 2008, he applied and was competi-

tively selected for undergraduate pilot training. He then earned a chance to fly the F-15E Strike Eagle at Mountain Home Air Force Base. As a Strike Eagle pilot, Preuss flew 53 sorties deployed to Al Dhafra Air Base. He is a senior pilot with 1,115 combat hours in the C-130 and F-15E in two combat theatres — Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

While serving at Columbus, Preuss was selected as the Wing’s 2015 Field Grade Officer of the Year.

His education includes a master’s in military operational art and science from Air University. He also earned the distinction of Top-Third Graduate at Squadron Officer School.

In addition, Preuss invests his talents and time in the community, serving with Habitat for Humanity, Race for the Cure, leading the base’s Air Force Assistance Fund and helping those less fortunate in other capacities.

In the summer of 2019, he will become the next T-38 Flying Training Squadron commander. 



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